

ADVANCED ETHICAL LITERARY INQUIRY

NIGHT OF THE TWISTERS

Student Mission & Response Journal

CENTRAL IDEA

What does a single night of real danger reveal about the people you love that an ordinary day never could?

Novel: Night of the Twisters by Ivy Ruckman

Setting: Grand Island, Nebraska, 1980, based on a real tornado outbreak

Designed for: Advanced readers in grades 3–5, with adaptable supports

TEXT USE

Use a teacher-approved copy of the complete 11-chapter novel, including its Associated Press foreword. This resource supplies original prompts and no reproduced passages.

Your Mission

Investigate one real, terrifying night through Dan Hatch's eyes: track how his feelings about his family change, what the storm actually costs the community, and how the story's ending compares to the real 1980 event it's based on.

Driving question

What does a single night of real danger reveal about the people you love that an ordinary day never could?

Reading Care

This book is based on a real disaster in which real people died. It includes house destruction, family separation and uncertainty, and the eventual, non-graphic news of a pet's and a neighbor's death. It also contains some outdated, insensitive language from when it was written in 1984 — your teacher will help you talk through that honestly. Ask for a preview or a different way to respond if you need one.

Use of the Novel

- Use a teacher-approved edition containing all 11 chapters and the AP foreword.
- Cite chapters; add page numbers only when everyone uses the same edition.
- Do not copy long passages. Record brief location notes and paraphrase evidence.
- The culminating mission requires the complete novel.

Conceptual Questions

Family Under Pressure

- How does Dan's feeling about his brother Ryan change over the course of the story?
- What does a crisis reveal about a family that an ordinary day doesn't?

Warnings & Real Danger

- What's the real difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning?
- Why is it so easy to stop taking routine warnings seriously?

Realistic vs. Tidy Endings

- How does this story's ending compare to the real 1980 event's actual death toll?
- Why include some real losses even in a mostly hopeful ending?

Reading Fairly

- How should a reader today handle an older book's dated language honestly?

Narrative Craft

- What does the hour-by-hour structure do to the story's pacing?
- Why jump forward a full year for the final chapter?

Reading Route

Mission	Chapters	Title	Transfer Question
1	Chapters 1–2	An Ordinary Tuesday	What does Dan's resentment toward his baby brother Ryan reveal about him before the storm changes everything?
2	Chapters 3–5	The Siren	Why do Dan and Arthur initially dismiss the tornado watch, and what does that dismissal cost them?
3	Chapters 6–8	What's Left	What does searching through the wreckage teach Dan about the difference between property and the people he loves?
4	Chapters 9–10	Reunion	What does the confusion and delay in reuniting with family reveal about how disasters actually unfold, compared to how they're often shown in fiction?
5	Chapter 11	One Year Later	Why include real losses — like Mrs. Smiley's death and the missing cat — in a story that otherwise ends hopefully?

Range alignment

The same five missions are used in the journal and facilitator guide. Mission 5 covers Chapter 11.

Edition Record

Publisher / year: _____ Format: _____

11 chapters + AP foreword confirmed: ☐ Yes ☐ No Page-number citations required: ☐ Yes ☐ No

People, Groups & Change

Person / Group	Role to Track	Question
Dan Hatch	12-year-old narrator	How does his view of his family change from before the storm to after?
Ryan Hatch	Dan's baby brother	What does Dan risk or sacrifice to protect him?
Arthur Darlington	Dan's best friend	How does their friendship help both boys survive?
Aunt Goldie	Dan's aunt, missing for part of the story	What does the uncertainty around her fate add to the story?
Mrs. Smiley	An elderly neighbor	What does she contribute to the community's recovery?

Discussion Toolkit

Move	Ask Yourself
Claim	What do I think is really going on?
Evidence	Which action, detail, or line supports it?
Reasoning	How does the evidence lead to that meaning?
Perspective	How would a different character describe this same moment?
Revision	What later evidence changes my claim?

- Separate the novel's fictional outcome from the real event's actual toll.
- Notice moments where warning fatigue puts characters at real risk.
- Discuss the book's dated language honestly, without repeating it.

Mission 1: An Ordinary Tuesday

CHAPTERS 1–2

Essential question

What does Dan's resentment toward his baby brother Ryan reveal about him before the storm changes everything?

Notice

What does this section show about how Dan feels toward his family?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Before/After Ledger

How does this section change what Dan values or notices, compared to before the storm?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

The novel is structured hour by hour through a single evening. What does this real-time pacing set up for later chapters, even while these opening hours feel ordinary?

Mission 2: The Siren

CHAPTERS 3–5

Essential question

Why do Dan and Arthur initially dismiss the tornado watch, and what does that dismissal cost them?

Notice

What does this section show about how Dan feels toward his family?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Before/After Ledger

How does this section change what Dan values or notices, compared to before the storm?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

Sound, light, and silence build tension through this section. Find one sensory detail and trace how it escalates from ordinary to alarming across these chapters.

Mission 3: What's Left

CHAPTERS 6–8

Essential question

What does searching through the wreckage teach Dan about the difference between property and the people he loves?

Notice

What does this section show about how Dan feels toward his family?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Before/After Ledger

How does this section change what Dan values or notices, compared to before the storm?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

The novel's descriptive language shifts from small, ordinary details earlier to disaster-scale imagery here. Find one example and explain how the shift in scale changes the reading experience.

Mission 4: Reunion

CHAPTERS 9–10

Essential question

What does the confusion and delay in reuniting with family reveal about how disasters actually unfold, compared to how they're often shown in fiction?

Notice

What does this section show about how Dan feels toward his family?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Before/After Ledger

How does this section change what Dan values or notices, compared to before the storm?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

Aunt Goldie's fate stays unknown for a stretch of the story. How does withholding this information from the reader (and from Dan) shape the pacing and tension of this section?

Mission 5: One Year Later

CHAPTER 11

Essential question

Why include real losses — like Mrs. Smiley's death and the missing cat — in a story that otherwise ends hopefully?

Notice

What does this section show about how Dan feels toward his family?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Before/After Ledger

How does this section change what Dan values or notices, compared to before the storm?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

The novel suddenly jumps forward a full year for its final chapter. What does this jump let the author show that continuing immediately after the storm wouldn't — and how does it change how you read everything before it?

Before/After Ledger: Whole-Book Pattern

Looking back across all five missions, what pattern do you see in how the storm changes what Dan pays attention to?

Historical & Ethical Inquiry

Use the companion context packet. Choose one question that helps interpret — not replace — the story.

- What really happened during the 1980 Grand Island tornado outbreak?
- What's the real difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning?
- How have emergency alert systems changed since 1980?
- What did Ivy Ruckman say about the real family experience behind this book?

Research Plan

Culminating Mission: The Real Storm Report

Complete-novel requirement

Read all 11 chapters and the AP foreword before completing this mission.

Write an analysis comparing the fictional Hatch family's experience to the real 1980 Grand Island tornado outbreak, using evidence from across the whole novel, at least one context source, and an honest account of what the story's hopeful ending leaves out.

Required Evidence

- Novel evidence from at least four of the five missions.
- At least one credible context source, with fact, inference, and judgment distinguished.
- A clear comparison between the novel's outcome and the real event's death toll and damage.
- A reflection on what this story can and cannot prove about real tornado science or disaster recovery.

Product Options

☐ Written report ☐ Illustrated timeline of the night ☐ Short podcast script ☐ Letter to a character ☐ Approved design

Culminating Planner

My claim about what this story reveals about family, in one sentence

Evidence plan (which missions, which moments)

Context source plan

What the hopeful ending leaves out

Student Rubric

Criterion	4 — Advanced	3 — Secure	2 — Developing	1 — Beginning
Interpretation	Nuanced, revisable	Clear and defensible	Broad or uneven	Summary / opinion
Novel Evidence	Precise across most missions	Relevant across missions used	Uneven or incomplete	Little / inaccurate
Context Evidence	Credible sources deepen interpretation	Accurate and connected	Mostly background	Unverified / absent
Fiction vs. Reality	Consistently compares story to real event	Compares them most of the time	Sometimes blurs them	Treats story as the full picture
Communication	Audience-shaped and clear	Clear and appropriate	Sometimes unclear	Incomplete
Reflection	Specific revision and next question	Explains growth	General process	Completion only

Reflection & Access

How did your understanding of Dan's family change?

Which evidence most disrupted your first idea?

What remains unresolved?

What support helped you show your best thinking?

Useful supports: ☐ preview questions ☐ audio + text ☐ writing before speaking ☐ speech-to-text ☐ visual organizer ☐
compacted practice ☐ independent extension